



H.R. 2192 – To amend title 38, United States Code, to establish an Ombudsman within the Department of Veterans Affairs

FLOOR SITUATION

H.R. 2192 is being considered on the floor under suspension of the rules and will require a two-thirds majority vote for passage. This legislation was introduced by Representative Paul Hodes (D-NH) on May 7, 2007. The House Committee on Veterans Affairs ordered the bill to be reported, as amended, by voice vote on July 16, 2008.

H.R. 2192 is expected to be considered on the floor of the House on July 29, 2008.

SUMMARY

H.R. 2192 establishes an Office of the Ombudsman at the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). The bill requires the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to appoint a Director who will report directly to the Secretary. The Director will be responsible for overseeing the efforts of patient advocates in the Administration and for helping to coordinate assistance for veterans who require aid from the Administration.

The Director would be required to appoint three regional administrators to support patient advocacy and resolve appeals from patients at VHA facilities. The Director must also establish a board to hear appeals referred by any regional administrator and to outline steps for resolving those issues raised in appeal.

BACKGROUND

Over 30,000 American military personnel have been wounded in operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Due to improved battlefield medicine, soldiers who might have died in past conflicts are now surviving, though with often serious disabilities. Such injuries often require long-term health care from the Veterans Affairs Department (VA) beyond the servicemember's discharge from service. In 2007, various Administration reports highlighted the need to improve case management for servicemembers and veterans in the military health system and in the VA.

An Ombudsman is generally an official charged with representing the interests of the public by investigating and addressing complaints reported by citizens, in this case veterans. In the United States, it has been noted that Members of Congress often perform the unofficial function of an Ombudsman at the Federal level. Members of Congress and Senators often interface with Executive agencies (like the VA) on behalf of their constituents. This informal job has become increasingly time-consuming. This practice has been criticized on the grounds that it interferes with a Representative's primary duty – to legislate.

COST

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that implementing the bill “would cost \$3 million over the 2009-2013 period.” [Full CBO Cost Estimate](#)

STAFF CONTACT

For questions or further information contact Adam Hepburn at 6-2302.